



Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

MONTANA WOLF PROGRAM WEEKLY REPORT

To: Interested Parties

From: MFWP Wolf Program Coordinator, Carolyn Sime

Subject: Wolf Program Activities and Related Information, December 13-19, 2008

Contributors to the Montana Wolf Weekly are Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks (FWP), Universities, USDA Wildlife Services (WS), the National Park Service (NPS; Glacier NP; Yellowstone National Park will be reported in the Wyoming Wolf Weekly), US Forest Service, Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes, and the Blackfeet Nation.

Highlighted activities relate to: monitoring, wolf – livestock interactions, outreach and education, research, law enforcement, and other miscellaneous topics of public interest. The Weekly Report will be available on each Monday, covering the previous week. It and other wolf program information (including the 2007 annual report) can be found at: <http://fwp.mt.gov/wildthings/wolf/default.html>.

Wolf Monitoring Activities

Enhanced efforts to get more accurate counts on known wolf packs and to investigate clusters of public wolf reports to verify the existence of new wolf packs are underway now that the hunting season is over and snow cover is persistent. However, the bitter cold temperatures have hampered ground-based field work and flights due to human safety factors. Efforts will be ongoing through the end of the month and likely into January.

Final 2008 minimum estimates of the number of wolf packs, total wolves, breeding pairs, the number of confirmed livestock killed by wolves, and wolves killed to address wolf-livestock conflicts will be available in early March 2009 when the 2008 Annual Report is completed and made available to the public. Until then, all media reports of wolves and/or livestock losses should be interpreted with a dose of caution, as numbers provided to the media have been preliminary estimates.

Flights: Laudon flew on December 4 and 5.

FWP encourages hunters, landowners, and other outdoor enthusiasts to report wolves through the online reporting button or to send in one of the pre-printed postcards available at all FWP offices, many US Forest Service offices, and license providers throughout the state. Information provided by the public helps FWP more accurately monitor wolf numbers and distribution in Montana.

Wolf - Livestock Activities

On the 16th, WS removed 1 wolf from the Pintler pack in response to a Dec. 7 confirmed depredation on private land in the Big Hole Valley north of Wisdom. WS is authorized to remove 1 more wolf and control work is ongoing.

On the 16th, efforts to collar a wolf and conduct lethal control for an uncollared pack east of Wisdom in the Big Hole Valley concluded. No wolves were caught / collared and none were killed. Field working conditions were challenging and the wolves traveled widely, despite the best efforts of WS. The livestock owner was notified that agency lethal control efforts concluded and the kill permit was canceled.

Outreach and Education Activities

It is getting to be the time of year when wolves disperse in search of mates just ahead of the breeding season. Wolves can act aggressively towards domestic dogs and kill dogs at any time of year, but that is especially the case during the wolf breeding season when wolves are inherently more aggressive towards each other and compete for breeding opportunities. During the months of December – February, FWP and WS notice an increase in wolf-dog encounters for domestic dog breeds. FWP reminds people that when wolves are in the area, please be aware that they may attack or injure dogs. It often helps to keep dogs in secure kennels or inside buildings at night and to not let them roam freely when humans are not around. When fresh wolf sign is found, place dogs on restraints and keep supervised. The 10j rule across the southern Montana Experimental Area allows individuals to harass or kill a wolf attacking or molesting their livestock and stock animals including pets. Across northern Montana in the Endangered Area, federal regulations do not allow the hazing, harassing or killing of wolves by private citizens. If you have concerns or problems with wolves close to your residence or your domestic livestock or pets, please inform the wolf specialist or FWP Office nearest you.

Research Activities

Nothing to report.

Law Enforcement and Related Activities

The radio collar signal from a male member of Fish Creek pack recently turned up on mortality in Idaho during a recent Idaho Fish and Game flight. Idaho and Montana will coordinate retrieval of the shed radio collar or the carcass, whichever the case may be.

Other

NEW -- Delisting Update:

The USFWS public comment period on its February 2007 proposal to delist the gray wolf in the northern Rocky Mountains closed on November 28. USFWS is in the process of reviewing public comment and any other new information submitted by the public or by subject area experts. Information about the delisting proposal is available at the USFWS northern Rocky Mountains wolf website: <http://westerngraywolf.fws.gov>. A decision is expected in the near future.

Current Management in Montana:

FWP, through an interagency cooperative agreement, is still the lead agency for all wolf conservation and management (within the bounds of federal regulations) so long as adequate federal funding continues to be made available. FWP will continue to monitor wolves, do public outreach, and guide and direct research activities. No public hunting or trapping is allowed. USDA Wildlife Services is still the agency to investigate causes of injured or dead

livestock and carry out FWP's decisions to address conflicts, as guided by federal regulations. Montana will continue to stay involved in litigation and any future delisting developments and will continue to seek the most efficient, successful path to delisting. FWP will also continue its collaborative work with Montana Tribes, other state and federal agencies, and the Montana Livestock Loss Reduction and Mitigation Program.

Check the wolf pages on the FWP website for important information and updates:

<http://fwp.mt.gov/wildthings/wolf/default.html>.

Montana Livestock Loss Reduction & Mitigation Board:

With the funds available in 2008, the Board decided to pay claims for dead livestock that USDA Wildlife Services determined as a "confirmed" or a "probable" wolf-related death. In addition, the Board decided to pay claims for injured animals investigated by USDA Wildlife Services that subsequently died as a result of a "confirmed" or a "probable" wolf-related incident.

The Livestock Loss Reduction & Mitigation Program ran out of funds for confirmed and probable livestock loss payments for 2008. Livestock owners are still encouraged to send in their loss claims to LLRMP. Claims will be processed in the order they are received and payments will be made when funding becomes available. We appreciate your patience while we are seeking funds. Currently, no funds are available for mitigation efforts but we hope to include this area in the future. If you are aware of any potential funding sources, please contact the LLRMP office.

The bill sponsored by Montana's Senator Tester to fund a grant program for reimbursement of wolf-losses and proactive projects was included in an Omnibus Public Lands Bill that contains more than 150 public lands, water and resources bills. The U.S. Congress will not hear the Omnibus bill during its lame duck session at the end of 2008. It is expected to come up early in 2009. The program recently received a donation from the Greater Yellowstone Coalition. A total of \$72,148.34 was paid out for confirmed and probable wolf-caused losses in the first seven months (mid-May to mid-November).

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To learn more about Montana's wolf population, the Montana program and to help FWP monitor wolves by reporting wolf sign, visit FWP at: www.fwp.mt.gov/wildthings/wolf.

To anonymously report a dead or injured wolf or suspected illegal activity, call: 1-800-TIP-MONT.

To request an investigation of injured or dead livestock, call USDA Wildlife Services directly in western Montana / Helena area at 458-0106 or in eastern Montana / Columbus area at: 322-4303. Or call your nearest FWP representative to have your call referred to Wildlife Services.

If you have a confirmed or probable livestock loss due to wolves, USDA Wildlife Services will supply you with a copy of the Loss Reimbursement Application form. For more information, see <http://liv.mt.gov/liv/LM/index.asp>. Or, contact the Livestock Loss Reduction and Mitigation Program Coordinator George Edwards at the Montana Department of Livestock at 444-5609.